

Andrea Bakalyar:

I Learned to Value Community and Service From My Dad

BY FRANK H. ANDORKA JR.

Andrea Bakalyar's voice rushes over the line with the wildness of raging river rapids, so quickly her listener must pause to catch his breath. Her joy as she describes her stepfather's gifts to her is electric — a jolt of warmth and love to the soul.

"Around the neighborhood, he's known as 'St. John' — though never to his face because he'd hate it," Bakalyar says, laughing. "He will help anyone at any time with anything. He's always been there for me when I needed him, and he taught me so much. He's been a great example of how to live."

Bakalyar, superintendent at the Wee Course at Williams Creek in Knoxville, Tenn., tells with evident relish of her father's first introduction into the world of golf course maintenance. The restless Bakalyar asked her father, John Merryman, if she could work on the neighboring golf course between shifts at the dairy farm where she grew up, a family operation since the 1800s.

Merryman considered the proposition for a moment. "I don't think they let girls work on golf courses, but you can try," he told Andrea, supporting her ambitions while trying to keep her hopes from being dashed if the course turned her down.

Little did John know then that his daughter would become a superintendent, one active in setting and advocating women's issues in a predominantly male industry. When she attended college for both teaching and nursing without settling on a career — and driving her mother to distraction ("Pick a career already," she remembers her mother saying in exasperation) — John calmed her fears.

"He told me I'd find the right thing for *me* eventually if I just followed my instincts," Bakalyar says. "You can't imagine how much his confidence in my decision-making ability meant. My parents never set limitations on me."

But his impact on her career runs far deeper than just support. On the dairy farm, Bakalyar absorbed lessons about commitment, hard work and responsibility. She watched

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Andrea Bakalyar and her father John Merryman

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her father rise daily to milk the cows at 5:30 a.m. When she says daily, she means *every* day.

"He never took a day off sick that I can remember," Bakalyar recalls. "He expected the same from his children, and we followed him into the barns as soon as we were able. I learned you should be productive every minute, and his amazing work ethic inspired me."

It wasn't always work, however. Andrea says her dad also showed her how to enjoy life.

"He knew when to play," Bakalyar says. "Dad always had time for the kids."

John's community involvement, however, stands as the lesson Bakalyar holds nearest to her heart. He opens his workshop to anyone with a project to do. He's a church councilman and resident caretaker for the congregation next door. He plows the neighborhood without payment when it snows.

Everyone knows John in Upperco, Md., and they genuinely *like* him. Bakalyar watched her father create a network of friends with his love and kindness that serves him to this day as a support system during difficult times. She vows to do the same in her life.

"When you grow up in that environment, it leaves a strong

"My father strives each day to be a little bit better than he was before. That's the kind of legacy I want to leave, too."

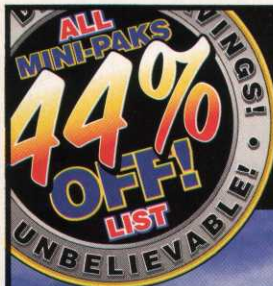
Andrea Bakalyar

impression," Bakalyar says. "You learn that you shouldn't do for others with the expectation of something in return. You should serve others because it's the right thing to do, and they will often return that kindness in most unexpected ways."

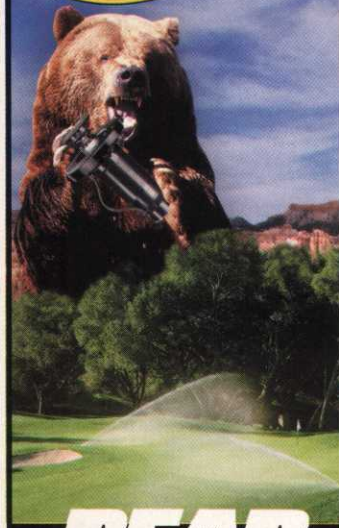
"My father strives each day to be a little bit better than he was before," Bakalyar says warmly. "That's the kind of legacy I want to leave, too." ■

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